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Camps and Trails

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By
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Camps and Trails

by

Henry Abbott

MY rifle was standing against a birch tree within easy reach of my right hand, while I, sitting on a log, was eating my lunch. A hunter's lunch is carried in a small cotton bag and a string tied around the mouth of the bag also secures it to one's belt. On one side of this bag, faded to a pale blue from many washings, appears printed matter containing a trade mark, a name of manufacturer or dealer and indications that the bag once contained sugar. The contents of the bag on this occasion just fitted my appetite.

While I was busily munching a sandwich I became aware of a curious bird sitting on the lower limb of a tree at

my left and about ten yards away. I do not mean that he was an unusual bird; he wore a plain slaty-gray coat and was a little larger than a full grown robin. He was quite a commonplace bird and one often seen in our northern forests. His name is canada jay. I do not know why, but he is also sometimes called whiskey jack. He was curiously and intently watching me with his right eye. Presently he turned his head and studied my operations with his left eye. Most birds and many animals who live in the woods have a distinct advantage over man in the fact that their eyes are so placed that they are able to look in opposite directions at the same time. They can thus look for their prey with one eye, while watching out for an enemy with the other.

This fellow was apparently not entirely satisfied with what his right eye

saw, so for purposes of confirmation he turned on me the left eye. I had not noticed his arrival. He had silently come after I sat down on the log. He now spread his wings and without a single flap silently skated across the air to another tree on my right but a little nearer, where he could "view the subject from another standpoint." It now occurred to me, that, possibly the jay bird might also be needing some lunch so I tossed a small piece of bread out on the other end of the log when he slid down and ate it. Then I invited him to come nearer; and presently, when I gave him a piece of meat he was eating it out of my hand. While I was closely watching my guest, there suddenly and as silently appeared a second bird walking down the log, and then in a moment a third arrived to join the lunch party. The strangest thing about the incident was the silence

and suddenness with which, like ghosts, the birds appeared before me, and when the last crumb had been devoured, they as silently slipped away.

The place where the jays and I met was in a dense forest about fifteen miles from any human habitation and it is probable that they had met the human animal so seldom that the native curiosity of the forest dweller had not yet given place to fear.

Bige and I were hunting. We were living at "The Dan'l Boone Camp" on the northwestern slope of Crescent Mountain. We left camp that morning about seven o'clock and together travelled down the valley, following one of our own trails about three miles until we crossed Pigeon Brook, where we separated. When Bige and I hunt, we always get far enough apart so there will be no possibility of shooting each other. Also, we hunt separately

The Dan'l Boon Cabin

to avoid conversation. Gossip on a "still hunt" is about the worst practice in which one can indulge.

On this occassion, it was agreed that Bige should climb the eastern end of Wild Cat Mountain and proceed along the top of the ridge which extends several miles toward the west, while I hunted through the valley and over the foot hills, meeting him on the western end of the ridge for lunch at twelve o'clock. It was now nearly one o'clock and as I had been unable to find Bige, I ate lunch with the jay birds as above described.

Since leaving Bige that morning I had seen no big game, but had shot a goshawk. Every guide and hunter of my acquaintance in the North Woods, is the sworn enemy of this bird of prey. No man is thought to have performed his duty if he allows one of these hawks to escape. The goshawk destroys many

song birds, but his particular object in life is to kill partridges. The partridge is one of our most desirable game birds. He has many enemies among the four footed residents of the forest. The owl also, will kill a partridge at night, while he is roosting in a tree; but the goshawk (sometimes called partridge hawk) pursues a policy of frightfulness amounting almost to extermination of the partridge. He will sit all day, and day after day in a tree in that part of the woods where a flock of young partridges live, watching his opportunity to pounce upon and kill them one after another, until the last one is disposed of; when he will go on a hunt for another flock.

The "Boche" which I shot was sitting on the limb of a tree eating something which he was holding down on the limb with one foot. On going up to the tree to pick up my hawk I found

on the ground, feathers, that I knew did not belong to him, and a few feet away, discovered a full grown partridge, recently killed, from the breast of which a piece of flesh had been torn out.

I suspect that our feeling of enmity toward the goshawk is not entirely due to sympathy for the defenseless partridge. Mixed motives may inspire us to acts of revenge. We, ourselves sometimes eat breast of partridge.

After my luncheon guests had gone, I took a drink of water at a spring near our lunch table and considered what should be my next move. Failing to meet Bige at the appointed place, I reasoned that, possibily he was on the trail of game which led in the opposite direction. In any case, I felt quite sure he would not, in returning, come back over the route I took going out; also that he would not feel safe in

crossing my path; so he most likely would go back on the northern slope of the mountain. Accordingly, I turned southward, intending after about a mile on that tack to swing toward the east and work back to the camp; crossing Pigeon Brook below where we had crossed it in the morning. This course would take me half-way up Crescent Mountain and around the outside curve of that ridge. I estimated that I could make this course back to camp, travelling quietly as a hunter should, in about five hours.

So, frequently consulting my compass, I proceeded down the mountain, over hillocks, across ravines, through swamps, often following the beaten path of a deer's runway; again, forcing a passage through a briar patch or tangled witch-hopple. Then, there were long stretches of smooth forest floor carpeted with a Persian rug of

Autumn leaves of brilliant and somber hues, woven into the most gorgeous and fantastic patterns. A soft October breeze rustled the tree tops and partially drowned the noise of rasping dry leaves under foot. It was an ideal day for wandering alone in the woods, far from the call of the telephone bell or the rush and jostle of the crowded city street.

Presently, coming over the top of a knoll, I saw a few rods ahead, a deer with gracefully mounted antlers which had recently been polished by rubbing them against bushes and saplings. The deer was making most unusual motions. I have seen deer in the woods doing many queer and unexplained things, but this fellow seemed to be digging a hole in the ground as does a rabbit or a woodchuck. He was pawing the earth with both fore feet; was working hard and giving his entire at-

tention to the job, while the leaves flew from his rapidly flying hoofs. His head was turned away from where I stood and he had not noted by approach, so I crept up behind a clump of bushes and watched the progress of what I believed to be a new game for deer to play. Presently he pushed his muzzle under a pile of leaves and lifted his head working his jaws vigorously. Then something fell from the tree above, hit him on the head and bounded off in the leaves. He paid not the slightest attention to it, but continued to paw the ground and occasionally root his nose into it like a hog.

Then I gave my attention to the tree under which the deer was digging and saw that it was a beech and that beech nuts were being shaken down by the wind and sifted through the fallen leaves; while the deer was pawing the leaves away to get the nuts.

About this time a shifting breeze carried the human scent to the deer's nostrils and his head came up with a jerk. He blew a bugle blast of warning that could be heard a mile down the valley, and with head and tail erect he bounded away down the hillside as if the Devil was after him.

Just then, it occurred to me that I had a rifle in my right hand and that, for that day at least, it was my business to hunt deer. By this time, however, several trees were between the deer and myself and though I could occasionally see the flash of his white tail in the distance it would have been folly to waste a shot on him. An examination of his tracks showed that he was covering twenty feet at every jump.

After gathering a pocketful of beech nuts for my own consumption, I proceeded on my way eating nuts and mus-

ing on the good judgment of the deer in his choice of food.

About an hour later I heard in the distance ahead, a rumbling noise that seemed like the long continued roll of a snare drum or the purr of an eight cylinder gasoline engine. I felt quite certain that no motor car would be found in this roadless wilderness but pressed forward to investigate. Proceeding in the direction from which the sounds came, which were now repeated at intervals, beginning slowly like a locomotive starting; I heard the bumps coming gradually faster and faster until they merged into a continuous rumble lasting for a half minute when the sounds died away as if the steam supply were exhausted.

I now recognized my old friend the ruffed grouse or drummer partridge on his drumming log. With tail

feathers spread fanwise, neck feathers ruffed up and the points of wing feathers dragging, he would strut like a turkey gobbler up and down the log until arriving at the particular drumming spot, he stretched his neck, filled his lungs with air, lifted wings and pounded his breast-bump-bump-thump-bup-br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

The drummer partridge—the male of the species is very fussy and particular about his drumming log. It is carefully selected with reference to its sonorous quality. He always drums on the same log and at exactly the same spot on that log throughout the season. Indeed the same log is likely to be used for drumming purposes several years, but it would be difficult to prove that the same bird did the drumming in successive seasons. One can, however, be quite certain that no two drummers ever occupy the same log in any single

season. The fittest would surely whip the weaker one and drive him away.

Several years ago, there was a drumming log about sixty feet back of our "Cedar Lake Camp." Bige and I were wakened early every morning by the old drummer announcing with his tattoo that it was time to get up. He was very regular in his habits and made an excellent alarm clock.

I had by now worked my way up close enough to the log to study the movements of the drummer; indeed I could have knocked him off of that log with a club. He soon discovered my presence, stopped drumming and flew up into a tree about thirty yards away.

We usually hunt partridge with a shot gun and are supposed to shoot them while on the wing. But if one meets a partridge while using a rifle the ethics of the woods requires that one must wait until the bird alights

and then shoot him only in the head or neck. Now, the neck of a partridge when the feathers are removed, is about the diameter of a lead pencil and the head is the size of a silver dime. This makes a small target to hit with a rifle at thirty yards, but it has been done, so I fired. The bullet passed close to his left ear causing him to sharply dodge toward the right. The second shot cut a feather from his neck, then he suddenly remembered an engagement he had with a lady bird on the other side of the valley.

I arrived at camp before dark and had a fire started, the potatoes put over to boil and other preparations for supper under way when Bige came staggering into camp with the hind quarters of a deer wrapped in the skin on his shoulders. Bige had put in a strenuous day, had carried his meat from the valley west of Wild Cat

Mountain, a distance of about seven miles and he had a good appetite for supper, which I had ready by the time he had put the venison in the cooler.

The cooler was an empty pork barrel which a year earlier we had procured at a lumber camp several miles down the valley; and which at great expenditure of effort and time we had rolled, tumbled and carried through the woods all the way back to our camp. We had then scrubbed out the barrel, weighted it with stones and in the shade of a clump of balsam trees had sunk it in a deep hole in the brook flowing from our spring so that the water came near its top. On nails inside of the barrel we hung our fresh meat and game, and the icy water from the spring flowing around the barrel kept the contents as hard and fresh as if in a cold-storage warehouse; while a slab of spruce bark

with a stone on top formed a cover to keep night prowling flesh-eating neighbors out of our refrigerator.

At the supper table I told Bige about the deer I had seen digging beech nuts, and he said that in dressing out the deer he shot, he found its stomach filled with beech nuts, and that they more nearly resemble buckwheat, than any other food a buck-deer can find in the woods. Long after the first snowfall in the Autumn one can find places where deer have pawed away the snow to dig beech nuts out from under the leaves.

In the middle of the night I was wakened by some unusual noise outside the cabin. Listening intently I heard footsteps softly padding down the path toward the spring brook. Not a breath of air was moving and the silence of the night was noisy and oppressive. Straining my ears I again

heard the soft foot falls. Then a sniffing, smelling sound. Later, two bright stars close together appeared through the open doorway about a foot above the sill. Twinkling, shining, expanding, the stars grew into a pair of eyes in the darkness. The owner of the eyes sniffed, then spoke, apparently to his partner outside,—"Uh huh!"—They're here!—"Uh huh! Uh huh!"—Been here before!—They're here again!—"Uh huh!" We keep a pile of dry wood inside the cabin for use in kindling fires on rainy days. From my bunk I reached over, grabbed a stick of wood and flung it through the doorday and the thieving coon in his striped prison garments scuttled away through the bush into the night.

The following morning we found the coon's tracks—they looked as if made by the hand of an infant—in the soft mud near our refrigerator.

After breakfast Bige and I sawed a couple of blocks, each about four feet long, off a spruce log. Then Bige took a pack-basket and went back to Wild Cat Mountain for the forequarters of the deer which he had left hanging in a tree the day before; while I, with an axe and a couple of hard wood wedges (the same tools with which Abe Lincoln, ninety years ago, split rails), proceeded to split the two spruce blocks into thin staves from six to eight inches wide. These I sharpened at one end and drove into the ground on the bank of the stream below the cooler; arranging them as nearly as possible in a circle with the edges touching and making a vertical cylinder about two and a half feet in diameter. I put hoops of osier withes around the tops of the staves and used other slabs of the spruce for a cover. Then I gathered stones and built a fireplace on the

gravelly bed near the water. A trench was dug from the fireplace up the sloping bank and under the cylinder of staves. This was covered with flat stones and dirt and it served as a flue to carry smoke from the fireplace by the brook into the smoke-house on the bank. In the smoke-house we hung strips of venison—the venison having first been packed in salt over night. The fire was kept smouldering and smoking by a liberal use of green birch wood. At the end of two days smoking we had on hand a stock of the finest "Jerked Venison" that any hunter ever put into his lunch bag. The smoke of green birch imparts a spicy flavor that is not found in jerked meat cured by the Indian method of drying in the sun.

The Dan'l Boone Cabin was built fifteen years ago, and was located in this particular spot because of a spring of pure cold water which we discovered

while on a hunting expedition. It is a long way from any lake but is in the edge of good hunting country. To reach it, from our cottage we went by boat up the lake to the mouth of the river, then proceeded along the river bank past the rapids about two miles to the falls. At the falls the township line crosses the river, and we followed it through the woods up over the top of the mountain and down to one of the foot hills on the opposite slope.

The township line was marked through the woods by four blazes on each tree, placed in the form of a diamond, a chip being cut out at each angles of the diamond. The line was practically straight and was not difficult to follow, except that it led up the steepest part of the mountain and over the highest ridge. In places one had to crawl on hands and knees and hang onto roots and bushes to avoid sliding

back. We had to climb just the same, both going and coming and with a heavy pack on one's back it was rather strenuous, and there were about four miles of the line that we used.

The Township Line

I felt confident that a better route could be found to the camp and Bige and I often discussed the matter but we continued to use the township line through the first season. One day during the second summer of our tenancy, while Bige was busy with some other chore, I took an axe and started out from camp, determined to mark a new and better trail out of the woods.

There was a steep rocky ledge or rather a succession of ledges, leading to the mountain top and I reasoned that if I kept to the left and below these ledges I should pass over the shoulder of the mountain thus avoiding the high ridge and steep part of our old trail. Then, after passing the rocky ledges I knew that if I continued on down hill I should, sooner or later, reach water; either the river or the lake. This was such a simple proposition that I should not need my compass so left it in camp.

In marking an ordinary trail through the woods a chip is cut out of a tree so as to expose the white wood under the bark, this we call a "blaze" and it is usually placed about five feet above the ground which brings the mark as nearly as possible on the line of vision. It also is high enough to be seen above the deep snows of winter. The dis-

tance between blazed trees depends upon the density of the forest, but in passing one mark the next one should always be in view. Also the trees should be marked on both sides so that the trail may be followed in both directions. A blaze on a soft wood tree, a pine, spruce, hemlock or balsam will remain white and visible longer than one made on a hardwood tree. The exposed wood of a beeeh, birch or maple becomes stained and browned in a few months and is not distinctly visible on a dark day; so we always mark the soft woods when possible.

A Trail Blaze

It was my purpose to first go through and mark out the new route, then, later with Bige's help cut the brush and clear fallen wood out of the path.

I made rapid progress, keeping the rocky ledges always in sight in the distance, but working well below and to the left of them. After about two hours work I crossed a line of old markings on the trees that looked strangely like the township line, but I knew it was not possible that it could be, as the township line was more than a half mile to the south of where I stood and moreover, it ran in a different direction. This must be a boundary line of the lumber company's property. So I continued on with my job of marking trees.

After another hour it occurred to me that it took a long time for me to get past the ledges of rock that pointed up to the ridge of the mountain top.

I ought surely, by this time, to be going down hill toward the river. So I stopped work to study the forestscape. There were the ledges in the distance on my right and the forest floor sloping gently to the left. There were the undisturbed, primeval forest trees with their tops a hundred or more feet above, branches interlaced and shutting out a view even of the clouds which now obscured the sun. There was very little underbrush and this suggested the thought that the task of clearing the path would be easy. Everything was as it should be, so I continued cutting chips out of trees on my new route.

A few minutes later I crossed another line of old blazes very like the one I had crossed an hour ago. This I decided was the other side of the lumber lot. In another quarter hour I met a third line of blazed trees. But this

time the marks were fresh, there was only one blaze on each side of a tree and there were fresh chips on the ground under them. This was most extraordinary. I could not conceive of any reason for any other person marking a trail in those woods, unless, possibly a surveyer might be at work there, but I had not met a surveyor in the woods since the Government Maps were made several years ago.

I determined to investigate, so struck my axe into a tree, left it there and started down this new trail to find the fellow who was making it. Broken ferns, trampled moss and bent bushes indicated that it had been made very recently and I might overtake the trail maker if I hurried up. So I stumbled along as fast as possible.

In about twenty minutes I saw an axe sticking in a blazed tree. The owner of that axe must be somewhere

near and I looked around for him. Not finding him within range of vision I examined the axe. It was mine! There was a nick in the helve that I had put there myself. But how the dickens did it get here? Was it possible that Bige? Yes, we had two axes in camp. No, that was the same axe I had taken out that morning. Its weight and shape suited me better than the other and so I had marked the handle.

Puzzling over the mysterious situation, I continued explorations. Leaving the axe sticking in the tree trunk, I started to climb over the rocks up the steep mountain side. In due time I reached the top and found the township line which I had many times followed over the ridge. I then proceeded along the ridge toward the south, but it ceased to be a ridge after a few rods and I soon climbed down steep rocky ledges till I met a new blazed trail.

Then I went back up the mountain and followed the township line down the steep part and met another new blazed trial. Then I followed this new blazed trail until I crossed the township line again and a few rods further on I came back to the axe sticking in the tree.

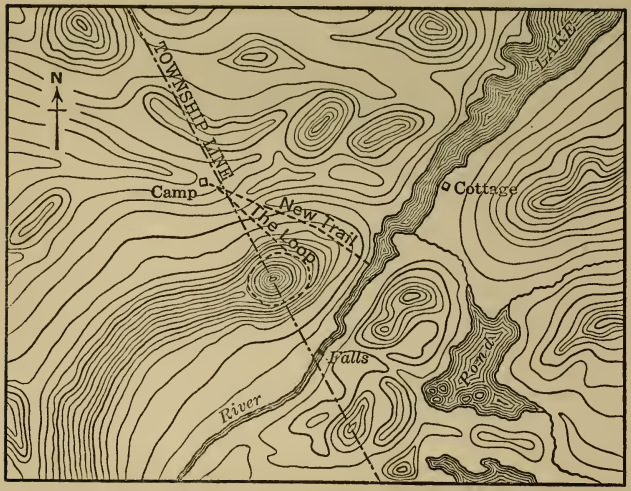
At this point in the game I peeled a piece of birch bark, sat down and with a stub of pencil made a diagram of the mountain and the various trails I had made and met during the day.

This was the northeastern end of the mountain which Bige and all the other guides for many years had known to be a crescent shaped ridge. They also had known that the ridge, following its curve was about three miles long. My discovery consisted in learning that this end of the mountain was a rocky cone-shaped peak and about three hundred feet higher than the top of the

ridge. Also that during an entire Summer we had been climbing over this peak on the township line and had thereby wasted many thousands of foot-pounds of energy.

By keeping the rocky ledges in view in laying out my new route, I had made a complete circle around the mountain peak, had twice crossed the township line and intersected my own trail at the end of the loop.

I reached camp about the time Bige had supper ready. At the table I told him about my new route to the river. "Sufferin Mike! well, by Gosh! Ha-ha-ha" spoke Bige. "The next time you lay out a trail, you take a compass along, and no matter how sure you may be that the compass is wrong, you go where the compass points. Many a man has been lost in the woods by refusing to be guided by his compass and using his own judgment instead."



Trails on Crescent Mountain

The following day, I went down to the lake and from the boat out in the middle of the lake I sighted across my compass over the shoulder of the mountain and determined that I should start from the shore of the lake, instead of the river, follow a course toward 280 degrees while the needle was at zero, till I reached the crest of the shoulder, and then swing toward 270 degrees. This proved to be the correct theory and in the course of time my three mile trail ended within ten rods of the cabin. This saved us a walk of two miles up the river bank and a boat ride of more than half a mile on the lake, besides cutting out a steep climb where the grade, in the opinion of one of our guests, was "ninety-five per cent."

This trail making incident occurred fourteen years ago. It serves to indicate how easy it is for one to go astray in a large forest. I have since blazed

many trails in the woods. I have also, many times been misplaced in the forest while hunting or exploring and am always on such occasions reminded of Bige's advice to "never argue with your compass while in the woods." Whenever my compass tells me that camp is in a direction opposite to that which reason and memory and the lay of the land indicates, my practice is to sit down on a log, lay the compass on the log, stand the gun up against a tree far enough away so the steel of its barrel will not influence the compass needle and try to arrange in mind the topography of the country I am in. After a reasonable rest I am always willing to follow the pointing of the compass at least for a limited distance.

The first impulse of one who thinks he is lost in the forest is that of haste. One is always in a desperate hurry to get somewhere quick. If this impulse

is obeyed and the now alarmed traveller rushes off at headlong speed, the danger is, not only that of going in the wrong direction, but in nine cases out of ten, the victim travels in circles. The psychology of deliberation is like first aid to the injured and the victim soon begins to realize that he is not really lost. He is only temporarily mislaid and will soon pull himself out and locate some familiar landmark.

The "Davy Crockett Camp" we built on a narrow shelf on a steep hillside. It overlooked "Muskrat City" which lay in the valley directly in front and below our open "lean-to." We were well pleased with the result of our efforts in the construction of this forest boarding house. It had a fireplace in front for heating the camp and a cooking fireplace at one side. This arrangement kept the cooking odors out of our camp blankets and clothing

We also had a dining table and a kitchen table, both made of split logs. The water was good and the entire outfit comfortable. Moreover, we generally had good luck in hunting while there.

The best way to reach Davy Crockett's was to go up the river about seven miles, then take the "Elk Pond Tote Road" back through the woods five miles to Muskrat City. We also sometimes used another route which was shorter but more difficult. This was by way of Dan'l Boone's; from which point we had cut a trail down the valley and over the western end of Crescent Mountain.

Several times I tried to get a photograph of the Crockett Camp. Because of its location I could get no standing room for a front view. If the camera was placed up the hill back of the camp the picture would show only the roof.

One day I climbed a tree with the camera and took a snap shot at the side. The artist spoiled this film in developing. The following winter, six feet of snow broke down the roof and in a wind storm a large tree fell across it and smashed the shack. It was not rebuilt and I never got a picture of the Davy Crockett Camp.

We once set up a tent alongside the "Cherry Pond Camp" and for a week, entertained there a party of six hunters and four guides. It proved to be a strenuous business to provide enough food for ten husky appetites. However, they all expressed the wish that they might come again; we therefore, concluded that they were not sent away very hungry.

The "Cedar Lake Camp" on the shore of that lake, was in a good fishing region. It was a starting point as well, for exploring trips. Through the

A Hunting Party at Cherry Pond Camp

waters of that lake and its many tributary streams with short carrys to other lakes and ponds, we could make long excursions by boat.

The "Buck Mountain Camp" was at first a cabin similar to Danl's. Later we built an open camp addition which we used for sleeping quarters during the summer but we usually slept in the cabin in cold weather. A short distance from this camp was "The Anxious Seat" which has been fully described in another story.

One day while staying at this camp I was hunting in the valley north of Parker's Pond. Had just crossed a beaver meadow and entered a thicket of balsam and cedar trees, when I came upon the saddest and most distressing sight I have ever witnessed in the woods. Under the shelter of these evergreen trees in a space perhaps twenty yards in diameter, I counted the bleach-

The Cedar Lake Camp

ing skeletons of seventeen deer. Eight of these were small, evidently the bones of young animals, less than a year old. The ground within this space was trampled hard and bare of green vegetation. Witch hopple bushes had been pulled up by the roots and the larger stems and branches stripped of twigs were left lying on the ground. Ground hemlock had been skinned of everything except the main stems. Even the bark was gone. The lower branches of the trees, balsam, cedar and a few hemlocks to a height of seven feet from the ground were stripped bare of twigs and bark. A fallen and rotting hardwood tree lay partly within the circle of death. Beyond the bone yard, this tree trunk was covered with a heavy coating of moss. Within, it had been scraped and gnawed. Starvation was written in large letters all over the place.

The Buck Mountain Camp

In summer time the deer find food in plenty everywhere; and in great variety. In winter their diet is more limited as to variety but they can always find enough food if they are able to move about. Deer can manage fairly well even in deep snows, so long as the snow remains soft. They also have been seen travelling on a hard crust formed on top of four or five feet of snow. But when the crust is thin and the deer breaks through, the thin sharp edges of icy crust cut his legs and a bloody trail marks the path of his floundering until, discouraged, he returns to the "yard" in the evergreen thicket, where he, and a number of his fellows herd together for protection from the cold winds of our northern winters. Within this yard the animals move about and pound down the falling snow, while outside, the drifts grow deeper. Here, when the crust

had formed on the snow and every green thing within easy reach had been eaten, the deer stood upon his hind legs, stretching his long neck to its utmost length and reached into the lower branches of the overhanging trees for a mouthful of browse. When the last scrap of brush had been devoured, too weak to longer stand, he lay down to await a slow and lingering death by starvation. And when the last feeble blat of the last surviving member of the herd trembled on the frosty air, the curtain fell on the saddest of all woodland tragedies.

Every summer we find it necessary to cut out trees which have been thrown across our trails by storms of the previous winter. Sometimes, the limb of a tree falls through the roof of one of our camps, making repairs necessary. Occasionally, in our absence, a porcupine gnaws our rustic camp stools

or eats up the dining table; now and then, some animal friend steals our food, but these are minor troubles that are easily cured or provided against.

A few times, other people have used our camps, but these, if they are real woodsmen and know how to use a camp, are always welcome. To such, "the latch string is always out." But the animal we most fear, indeed the most destructive animal that ever enters the woods, is the picnicker. His bump of destructiveness is, if one may judge by his works, abnormally developed. He is never constructive. He calmly makes use of the works of others without ever saying, by your leave. Seemingly, he is never happy, unless he is tearing down something that others have painstakingly and laboriously constructed.

When your picnicker enters a camp, he burns up the firewood if any has

been left there, and he always uses the balsam boughs of the camp bed for kindling. Also, he uses a lot of it for fun, just to see it blaze up high and throw out sparks. He never has been known to cut firewood. He has no axe and wouldn't know how to use an axe if he had one; so when he arrives at a camp, if no wood is found ready to hand, he burns up the rustic seats. Next he burns the slats of the bed, then the camp table, then a part of the frame or roof timbers of the camp. When he departs the ground is left strewn with scraps of the late meal, lunch boxes, newspapers, tin cans and other refuse. After a few visits of picnic parties the camp is a complete and hopeless ruin.

A few years ago, George and Leslie built a camp for Judge Bowles. It was located at the place where the trail to Bald Mountain Pond crosses High

The High Ball Brook Camp—before

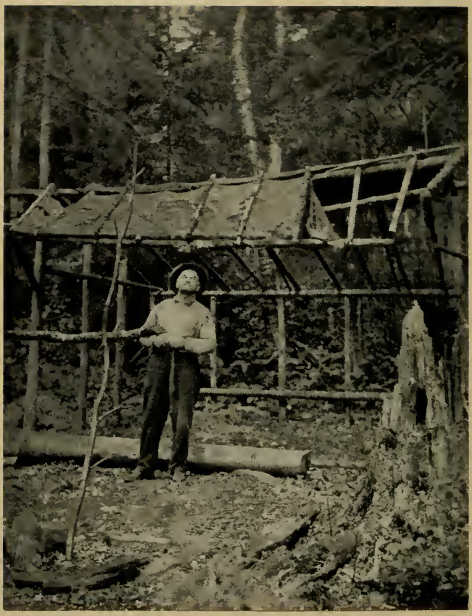
Ball Brook. The camp had a frame made of saplings that was covered with tar paper. It had a good bed, rustic table with bark top, seats, fireplace, etc., and was, in every way comfortable. The Judge and his friends stayed in his camp one night. After that, whenever he visited the place, he found it occupied by a picnic party.

The trail to Bald Mountain Pond was marked many years ago by the Indians. It is now a well beaten path, known and used by Summer residents and boarders along both shores of the lake through fourteen miles of its length. They came in motor boats, in parties of four, of six, of a dozen, and twenty-five or thirty at a time. It was a short and easy walk of a half an hour through the woods to the camp. The picnickers did the rest. The two pictures "before" and "after" herewith,

show what happened in one short season to the Judge's camp.

Most of the camps that Bige and I have built, are too far from the main lines of motor boat travel, and they require the expenditure of too much effort to reach them, to make them attractive to the average picnicker. Yet, mindful of the fate of the High Ball Brook Camp, we have in some cases thought it wise to camouflage the trail. Many novel and some ingenious devices have been employed to this end.

One misguiding scheme, we successfully practiced as follows. At a place where the trail should, properly, describe an elbow or a curve, the blazing of trees would continue on in a straight line, leading possibly over a hill or down through a swamp where it would peter out and end in nothing. Then returning to the elbow or turning point, the real trail would be marked by tak-



The High Ball Brook Camp—after

ing bunches of moss off the hardwood trees and nailing them onto balsam or spruce trees. This practice would be followed for fifty yards or more, when the blazes would begin to appear again. Of course, an old and experienced woodsman, if he were suspicious of a trick, would never be caught by this one; as he would know that moss never grows on a live spruce tree, except in small patches near the roots in a wet or swampy place, while an entire Russian beard of moss can be seen anywhere on beech, maple or birch trees. Indeed, at the place

Whiskers On A Spruce

where we thus marked our trail, one could, without moving a step, count twenty or more similar bunches of whiskers on as many hardwood trees within his range of vision. However, the picnickers never got by.

The struggle for existence, the elbowing, pushing and crowding of individuals, and the final survival of the stronger, the more fortunately placed, or the one who arrived and got established first, is nowhere in nature more marked or more conspicuous than among forest trees. The weaker ones die before they mature, because there is not "room in the sun" for the branches of all; and because, as the roots develop and increase in size, there is not enough room in the ground for the roots of all. Also, there is not enough plant food in the soil to sustain life in all the trees that get a start in the forest. Hence, it is,

that in the older woods one can always find, still standing but dead and dry, half grown trees of all kinds. Of these, the hardwoods make the very best fuel for campfires. And a dead spruce six to ten inches in diameter makes excellent logs for building an open camp or a cabin. The smaller dry spruces, three to four inches in diameter, make better roof timbers than do green ones. But they must be taken while standing. A tree lying on the ground in the shade, absorbs and retains moisture and it soon decays and is unfit for use for any purpose. Thus, while conserving live forest trees, one may obtain material better suited to his purpose than if he had used green timber having a market value.

The State owns more than two million acres of forest land in the northern mountains. A few years ago, it was permissible to build log camps on

State lands. Recent laws forbid this, and now camping on forest land owned by the State is limited to the use of tents.

Now, when Bige and I decide to build a shack we select a spot on some lumber companies' property and then try to get from the owners, permission to build. Such a permit is usually not difficult to get, but one must always furnish evidence of his knowledge of woodcraft, especially of his ability to so construct a camp fireplace as to prevent the fire spreading to the woods and thus destroying a lot of property.

"The Trout Hatchery Camp" is of this class, the owners only reserving the right to use the camp for their own employees in case of need. I believe that in a period of five years they have so used it only twice. On one occasion a party of surveyors, who were correcting and reblazing the boundary line of

the companies' property, spent a night in the camp. On another occasion some men were sent over the mountain from headquarters to put out a fire about a half mile from The Hatchery. This fire had been started by a careless cigarette smoking hunter who threw a burning cigarette butt down in the dry leaves.

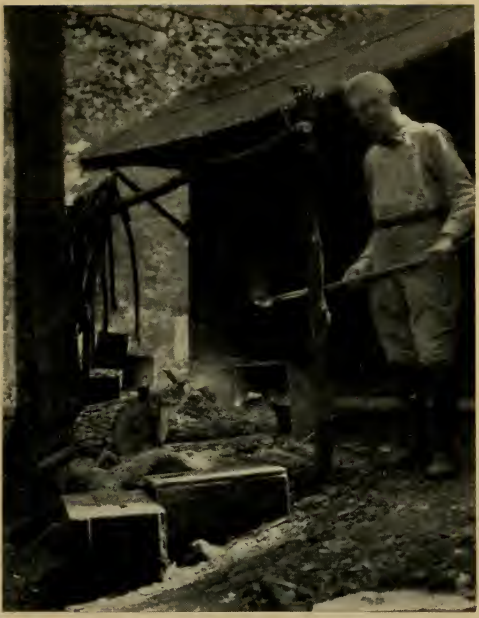
The Hatchery camp was built by Bige and Bill at a time when I was carrying about with me a rather complicated harness in which was a broken arm; so, I had no *hand* in its construction, but I contributed a lot of advice. I have found it a very comfortable living place.

It has for many years been our practice, on occasions when we happened to have a good supply of game in the cooler, to go back to the cottage by the lake, collect our women folks and lead them over the trail to camp, where

we would give them an exhibition of real camp cookery; while we roasted a saddle of venison before the campfire, serving it to our distinguished guests while they sit upon logs around our rustic camp table in the shade of the towering forest trees. Thus do we square ourselves, justify long absences and gain new indulgences.

There is a wonderful spring at The Hatchery. The water is very cold and there is a large volume of it boiling out of fissures in the rocks on the mountain side. Indeed it is the beginning of a fair sized brook which tumbles over the boulders and swiftly rushes along its gravelly bed just back of the cabin. By its music we are lulled to sleep at night and it is the first sound to greet us at day break.

Bige allowed that it was a great pity that there were no holes in that brook with water deep enough for trout to



Basting a Venison Roast

live in as the water was ideal for that purpose. Trout are fond of cold spring water. They flourish best in it. Besides, the nearest trout brook was two miles away, and sometimes, during the open season, we need fish. So, said we, "let's *make* some holes."

Immediately, we got busy building a dam across the stream near the shack. We employed some of the methods of Brother Beaver, which, though primitive, are none the less effective, and we soon had a pool of water from three to four feet deep, seventy feet long and twenty feet wide at the dam. Then selecting our smallest hooks, we filed off the barbs and went down to Pickwacket Brook where we caught some trout which we kept alive and brought back in a bait pail. Many and frequent changes of the water were necessary to keep our fish alive, but they were safely deposited in the pool.

A Dinner Party at Camp Hatchery

Then, a more pretentious plan was devised and in carrying it into effect, we built other dams, five in all, with stretches of swift water between. Gravelly and sandy spawning beds were provided in the shallow water. Overflow or spillway places were made on one end of each dam, so that the fish might freely pass up or down from one pool to another. Stones and overhanging banks made suitable hiding places for the shyest and most wary fish known to anglers. In short, we reproduced as nearly as possible the most favorable conditions for the natural propagation of brook trout.

Many fishing trips were made before we considered our hatching ponds sufficiently stocked. At first we fed our fish daily, but we soon learned that they had natural food in abundance and that they preferred it to what our catering provided.

During three summers that our experiment in pisciculture has been in progress, not the least of the pleasures of life at Camp Hatchery, is found in watching the spawning beds, observing the play of schools of fingerlings, or lying on the shore of one of the pools in the evening twilight, to see the larger trout jump clear above the surface and grab a passing fly or moth.

Enemies of the brook trout, neither those of the two-legged nor those of the four-legged varieties have yet seriously raided our fish farm. Individuals of the original planting have now developed into the most desirable sizes for table use. And it is now possible for me, in the morning while Bige is lighting the camp fire, to take a fly rod, go twenty yards back of the cabin to one of the pools and by the time Bige has the coffee made and the bacon

cooked, have my breakfast trout caught, dressed, and in the frying pan before they have finished flopping.

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